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St Ambrose

Concerning Repentance (Book I)

Introduction.
These two books were written against the Novatian heresy, which took its name, and to a considerable extent its form, from Novatus, a priest of the Church of Carthage, and Novatian, schismatically consecrated bishop at Rome. It was the outcome of a struggle which had long existed in the Church upon the question of the restitution to Church privileges of those who had fallen into grievous sin, and the possibility of their repentance.

The severest ground was taken by the Novatians, who were condemned successively by many councils, which maintained the power of the Church to admit those guilty of any sin whatsoever to repentance, and prescribed various rules and penalties applicable to different cases. The heresy, however, lasted for some time, becoming weaker in the fifth century, and gradually fading away as a separate body with a distinctive name. Novatianism, in the tests which it used, its efforts after a perfectly pure communion, its crotchetty interpretations of Scripture, and many other features, presents a striking parallel to many modern sects. [See Dict. Chr. Biog., Blunt, Sects and heresies, Ceillier, II. 427, etc.]

St. Ambrose, in writing against the Novatians, seems to have had some recent publication of theirs in his mind, which is now unknown. He begins by commending gentleness, a quality singularly wanting in the sect; speaks of the power committed to the Church of forgiving the greatest sins, and points out how God is more inclined to mercy than to severity, and refutes the arguments of the Novatians based on certain passages of holy Scripture. In the second book, after urging the necessity of careful and speedy repentance, and the necessity of confessing one's sins, St. Ambrose meets the Novatian arguments based on Heb. vi. 4-6, from which they inferred the impossibility of restoration; and on St. Matthew 12:31-32, our Lord's words concerning sin against the Holy Spirit.

As regards the date of this treatise, it must have been somewhat before the exposition of Ps. xxxvii., which refers to it, but there is nothing else which can be taken as a certain guide. Possibly the Benedictine Editors are right in assigning it to about a.d. 384.

Some few persons, probably on doctrinal grounds, have been led to question the authorship of this treatise, but it is quoted by St. Augustine, and there has never been any real doubt on the subject.

Chapter 1
St. Ambrose writes in praise of gentleness, pointing out how needful that grace is for the rulers of the Church, and commended to them by the meekness of Christ. As the Novatians have fallen away from this, they cannot be considered disciples of Christ. Their pride and harshness are inveighed against.

1. If the highest end of virtue is that which aims at the advancement of most, gentleness is the most lovely of all, which does not hurt even those whom it condemns, and usually renders those whom it condemns worthy of absolution. Moreover, it is the only virtue which has led to the increase of the Church which the Lord sought at the price of His own Blood, imitating the lovingkindness of heaven, and aiming at the redemption of all, seeks this end with a gentleness which the ears of men can endure, in presence of which their hearts do not sink, nor their spirits quail.

2. For he who endeavours to amend the faults of human weakness ought to bear this very weakness on his own shoulders, let it weigh upon himself, not cast it off. For we read that the Shepherd in the Gospel Luke 15:5 carried the weary sheep, and did not cast it off. And Solomon says: Be not overmuch righteous; Ecclesiastes 7:17 for restraint should temper righteousness. For how shall he offer himself to you for healing whom you despise, who thinks that he will be an object of contempt, not of compassion, to his physician?

3. Therefore had the Lord Jesus compassion upon us in order to call us to Himself, not frighten us away. He came in meekness, He came in humility, and so He said: Come unto Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Matthew 11:28 So, then, the Lord Jesus refreshes, and does not shut out nor cast off, and fitly chose such disciples as should be interpreters of the Lord's will, as should gather together and not drive away the people of God. Whence it is clear that they are not to be counted among the disciples of Christ, who think that harsh and proud opinions should be followed rather than such as are gentle and meek; persons who, while they themselves seek God's mercy, deny it to others, such as are the teachers of the Novatians, who call themselves pure.

4. What can show more pride than this, since the Scripture says: No one is free from sin, not even an infant of a day old; and David cries out: Cleanse me from my sin. Are they more holy than David, of whose family Christ vouchsafed to be born in the mystery of the Incarnation, whose descendant is that heavenly Hall which received the world's Redeemer in her virgin womb? For what is more harsh than to inflict a penance which they do not relax, and by refusing pardon to take away the incentive to penance and repentance? Now no one can repent to good purpose unless he hopes for mercy.

Chapter 2

The assertion of the Novatians that they refuse communion only to the lapsed agrees neither with the teaching of holy Scripture nor with their own. And whereas they allege as a pretext their reverence for the divine power, they really are contemning it, inasmuch as it is a sign of low estimation not to use the whole of a power entrusted to one. But the Church rightly claims the power of binding and loosing, which heretics have not, inasmuch as she has received it from the Holy Spirit, against Whom they act presumptuously.

5. But they say that those should not be restored to communion who have fallen into denial of the faith. If they made the crime of sacrilege the only exception to receiving forgiveness, they would be acting harshly indeed, and, as it would seem, would be in opposition to the divine utterances only, while consistent with their own assertions. For when the Lord forgave all sins, He made an exception of none. But since, as it were after the fashion of the Stoics, they think that all sins are equal in gravity, and assert that he who has stolen a common fowl, as they say, no less than he who has smothered his father, should be for ever excluded from the divine mysteries, how can they select those guilty of one special offense, since even they themselves cannot deny that it is most unjust that the penalty of one should extend to many?

6. They affirm that they are showing great reverence for God, to Whom alone they reserve the power of forgiving sins. But in truth none do Him greater injury than they who choose to prune His commandments and reject the office entrusted to them. For inasmuch as the Lord Jesus Himself said in the Gospel: Receive the Holy Spirit: whosesoever sins you forgive they are forgiven unto them, and whosesoever sins you retain, they are retained, John 20:22-23 who is it that honours Him most, he who obeys His bidding or he who rejects it?

7. The Church holds fast its obedience on either side, by both retaining and remitting sin; heresy is on the one side cruel, and on the other disobedient; wishes to bind what it will not loosen, and will not loosen what it has bound, whereby it condemns itself by its own sentence. For the Lord willed that the power of binding and of loosing should be alike, and sanctioned each by a similar condition. So he who has not the power to loose has not the power to bind. For as, according to the Lord's word, he who has the power to bind has also the power to loose, their teaching destroys itself, inasmuch as they who deny that they have the power of loosing ought also to deny that of binding. For how can the one be allowed and the other disallowed? It is plain and evident that either each is allowed or each is disallowed in the case of those to whom each has been given. Each is allowed to the Church, neither to heresy, for this power has been entrusted to priests alone. Rightly, therefore, does the Church claim it, which has true priests; heresy, which has not the priests of God, cannot claim it. And by not claiming this power heresy pronounces its own sentence, that not possessing priests it cannot claim priestly power. And so in their shameless obstinacy a shamefaced acknowledgment meets our view.

8. Consider, too, the point that he who has received the Holy Ghost has also received the power of forgiving and of retaining sin. For thus it is written: Receive the Holy Spirit: whosesoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven unto them, and whosesoever sins you retain, they are retained. John 20:22-23 So, then, he who has not received power to forgive sins has not received the Holy Spirit. The office of the priest is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and His right it is specially to forgive and to retain sins. How, then, can they claim His gift who distrust His power and His right?

9. And what is to be said of their excessive arrogance? For although the Spirit of God is more inclined to mercy than to severity, their will is opposed to that which He wills, and they do that which He wills not; whereas it is the office of a judge to punish, but of mercy to forgive. It would be more endurable, Novatian, that you should forgive than that you should bind. In the one case you would assume the right as one who rarely offended; in the other you would forgive as one who had fellow-feeling with the misery of sin.

Chapter 3

To the argument of the Novatians, that they only deny forgiveness in the case of greater sins, St. Ambrose replies, that this is also an offense against God, Who gave the power to forgive all sins, but that of course a more severe penance must follow in case of graver sins. He points out likewise that this distinction as to the gravity of sins assigns, as it were, severity to God, Whose mercy in the Incarnation is overlooked by the Novatians.

10. But they say that, with the exception of graver sins, they grant forgiveness to those of less weight. This is not the teaching of your father, Novatian, who thought that no one should be admitted to penance, considering that what he was unable to loose he would not bind, lest by binding he should inspire the hope that he would loose. So that your father is condemned by your own sentence, you who make a distinction between sins, some of which you consider that you can loose, and others which you consider to be without remedy. But God does not make a distinction, Who has promised His mercy to all, and granted to His priests the power of loosing without any exception. But he who has heaped up sin must also increase his penitence. For greater sins are washed away by greater weeping. So neither is Novatian justified, who excluded all from pardon; nor are you, who imitate and, at the same time, condemn him, for you diminish zeal for penance where it ought to be increased, since the mercy of Christ has taught us that graver sins must be made good by greater efforts.

11. And what perversity it is to claim for yourselves what can be forgiven, and, as you say, to reserve to God what cannot be forgiven. This would be to reserve to oneself the cases for mercy, to God those for

severity. And what as to that saying: Let God be true but every man a liar, as it is written, That You might be justified in Your words, and overcome when You are judged? Romans 3:4 In order, then, that we may recognize that the God of mercy is rather prone to indulgence than to severity, it is said: I desire mercy rather than sacrifice. Hosea 6:6 How, then, can your sacrifice, who refuse mercy, be acceptable to God, since He says that He wills not the death of a sinner, but his correction? Ezekiel 18:32

12. Interpreting which truth, the Apostle says: For God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Romans 8:3-4 He does not say in the likeness of flesh, for Christ took on Himself the reality not the likeness of flesh; nor does He say in the likeness of sin, for He did no sin, but was made sin for us. Yet He came in the likeness of sinful flesh; that is, He took on Him the likeness of sinful flesh, the likeness, because it is written: He is man, and who shall know Him? He was man in the flesh, according to His human nature, that He might be recognized, but in power was above man, that He might not be recognized, so He has our flesh, but has not the failings of this flesh.

13. For He was not begotten, as is every man, by intercourse between male and female, but born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin; He received a stainless body, which not only no sins polluted, but which neither the generation nor the conception had been stained by any admixture of defilement. For we men are all born under sin, and our very origin is in evil, as we read in the words of David: For lo, I was conceived in wickedness, and in sin did my mother bring me forth. Therefore the flesh of Paul was a body of death, as he himself says: Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Romans 7:24 But the flesh of Christ condemned sin, which He felt not at His birth, and crucified by His death, so that in our flesh there might be justification through grace, in which before there had been pollution by guilt.

14. What, then, shall we say to this, except that which the Apostle said: If God is for us, who is against us? He who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how has He not with Him also given us all things? Who shall lay a charge against the elect? It is God Who justifies, who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Who died, yea, Who also rose again, Who is at the right hand of God, Who also makes intercession for us. Romans 8:31-35 Novatian then brings charges against those for whom Christ intercedes. Those whom Christ has redeemed unto salvation Novatian condemns to death. Those to whom Christ says: Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am gentle, Matthew 11:29 Novatian says, I am not gentle. On those to whom Christ says: You shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is pleasant and My burden is light, Matthew 11:30 Novatian lays a heavy burden and a hard yoke.

Chapter 4

St. Ambrose proceeds with the proof of the divine mercy, and shows by the testimony of the Gospels that it prevails over severity, and he adduces the instance of athletes to show that of those who have denied Christ before men, all are not to be esteemed alike.

15. Although what has been said sufficiently shows how inclined the Lord Jesus is to mercy, let Him further instruct us with His own words, when He would arm us against the assaults of persecution. Fear not, He says, those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear Him Who can cast both body and soul into hell. Matthew 10:28 And farther on: Every one, therefore, who shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father, Who is in heaven, but he who shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father, Who is in heaven. Matthew 10:32-33

16. Where He says that He will confess, He will confess every one. Where He speaks of denying, He does not speak of denying every one. For, whereas in the former clause He says, Every one who shall

confess Me, him will I confess, we should expect that in the following clause He would also say, Every one who shall deny Me. But in order that He might not appear to deny every one, He concludes: But he who shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny. He promises favour to every one, but He does not threaten the penalty to every one. He makes more of that which is merciful. He makes less of what is penal.

17. And this is written not only in that book of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, which is written according to Matthew, but it is also to be read in that which we have according to Luke, Luke 12:8-9 that we might know that neither had thus related the saying by chance.

18. We have said that it is thus written. Let us now consider the meaning. Every one, He says, who shall confess Me, that is to say, of whatever age, of whatever condition he may be, who shall confess Me, he shall have Me as the Rewarder of his confession. Whereas the expression is, every one, no one who shall confess is excluded from the reward. But it is not said in like manner, Every one who shall deny shall be denied, for it is possible that a man overcome by torture may deny God in word, and yet worship Him in his heart.

19. Is the case the same with him who denies voluntarily, and with him whom torture, not his own will, has led to denial? How unfit were it, since with men credit is given for endurance in a struggle, that one should assert that it had no value with God! For often in this world's athletic contests the public crown together with the victors even the vanquished whose conduct has been approved, especially if perchance they have seen that they lost the victory by some trick or fraud. And shall Christ suffer His athletes, whom He has seen to yield for a moment to severe torments, to remain without forgiveness?

20. Shall not He take account of their toil, Who will not cast off for ever even those whom He casts off? For David says: God will not cast off for ever, and in opposition to this shall we listen to heresy asserting, He does cast off for ever? David says: God will not for ever cut off His mercy from generation to generation, nor will He forget to be merciful. This is the prophet's declaration, and there are those who would maintain a forgetfulness of mercy on God's part.

Chapter 5

The objection from the unchangeableness of God is answered from several passages of Scripture, wherein God promises forgiveness to sinners on their repentance. St. Ambrose also shows that mercy will be more readily accorded to such as have sinned, as it were, against their will, which he illustrates by the case of prisoners taken in war, and by language put into the mouth of the devil.

21. But they say that they make these assertions in order not to seem to make God liable to change, as He would be if He forgave those with whom He was angry. What then? Shall we reject the utterances of God and follow their opinions? But God is not to be judged by the statements of others, but by His own words. What mark of His mercy have we more ready at hand than that He Himself, through the prophet Hosea, is at once merciful as though reconciled to those whom in His anger He had threatened? For He says: O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you, or what shall I do unto you, O Judah? Your kindness, etc. Hosea 6:4 And further on: How shall I establish you? I will make you as Admah, and as Zeboim. Hosea 11:8 In the midst of His indignation He hesitates, as it were, with fatherly love, doubting how He can give over the wanderer to punishment; for although the Jew deserves it, God yet takes counsel with Himself. For immediately after having said, I will make you as Admah and as Zeboim, which cities, owing to their nearness to Sodom, suffered together in like destruction, He adds, My heart is turned against Me, My compassion is aroused, I will not do according to the fierceness of Mine anger. Hosea 11:8

22. Is it not evident that the Lord Jesus is angry with us when we sin in order that He may convert us through fear of His indignation? His indignation, then, is not the carrying out of vengeance, but rather the working out of forgiveness, for these are His words: If you shall turn and lament, you shall be saved. He waits for our lamentations here, that is, in time, that He may spare us those which shall be eternal. He waits for our tears, that He may pour forth His goodness. So in the Gospel, having pity on the tears of the widow, He raised her son. He waits for our conversion, that He may Himself restore us to grace, which would have continued with us had no fall overtaken us. But He is angry because we have by our sins incurred guilt, in order that we may be humbled; we are humbled, in order that we may be found worthy rather of pity than of punishment.

23. Jeremiah, too, may certainly teach when he says: For the Lord will not cast off for ever; for after He has humbled, He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies, Who has not humbled from His whole heart nor cast off the children of men. Lamentations 3:31-32 This passage we certainly find in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and from it, and from what follows, we note that the Lord humbles all the prisoners of the earth under His feet, Lamentations 3:34 in order that we may escape His judgment. But He does not bring down the sinner even to the earth with His whole heart Who raises the poor even from the dust and the needy from the dunghill. For He brings not down with His whole heart Who reserves the intention of forgiving.

24. But if He brings not down every sinner with His whole heart, how much less does He bring down him with His whole heart who has not sinned with his whole heart! For as He said of the Jews: This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, Isaiah 29:13 so perhaps He may say of some of the fallen: They denied Me with their lips, but in heart they are with Me. It was pain which overcame them, not unfaithfulness which turned them aside. Matthew 15:8 But some without cause refuse pardon to those whose faith the persecutor himself confessed up to the point of striving to overcome it by torture. They denied the Lord once, but confess Him daily; they denied Him in word, but confess Him with groans, with cries, and with tears; they confess Him with willing words, not under compulsion. They yielded, indeed, for a moment to the temptation of the devil, but even the devil afterwards departed from those whom he was unable to claim as his own. He yielded to their weeping, he yielded to their repentance, and after making them his own lost those whom he attached when they belonged to Another.

25. Is not the case such as when any one carries away captive the people of a conquered city? The captive is led away, but against his will. He must of necessity go to foreign lands, does not willingly make the journey; he takes his native land with him in his heart, and seeks an opportunity to return. What then? When any such return, does any one urge that they should not be received; with less honour indeed, but with readier will, that the enemy may have nothing with which to reproach them? If you pardon an armed man who was able to fight, do you not pardon him in whom faith alone waged the battle?

26. If we were to enquire what is the opinion of the devil concerning those who have fallen after this sort, would he not probably reply: This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me? For how can he be with me who does not depart from Christ? Without any cause do they appear to honour me who keep the doctrine of Jesus, and I thought that they would teach mine. They condemn me all the more when they forsake me after trial. Indeed Jesus is more glorified in these, when He receives them on their return to Him. All the angels rejoice, for in heaven there is greater joy over one sinner that repents, than over ninety and nine just persons who need not repentance. I am triumphed over in heaven and on earth. Christ loses nothing when they who came to me with weeping return with

longing to the Church, and I am in danger even as regards my own, who will learn that in reality there is nothing here where men are led on by present rewards, but that there must be very much there where groans and tears and fasts are preferred to my feasts.

Chapter 6

The Novatians, by excluding such from the banquet of Christ, imitate not indeed the good Samaritan, but the proud lawyer, the priest, and the Levite who are blamed in the Gospel, and are indeed worse than these.

27. Do you then, O Novatians, shut out these? For what is it when you refuse the hope of forgiveness but to shut out? But the Samaritan did not pass by the man who had been left half dead by the robbers; he dressed his wounds with oil and wine, first pouring in oil in order to comfort them; he set the wounded man on his own beast, on which he bore all his sins; nor did the Shepherd despise His wandering sheep.

28. But you say: Touch me not. You who wish to justify yourselves say, He is not our neighbour, being more proud than that lawyer who wished to tempt Christ, for he said Who is my neighbour? He asked, you deny, going on like that priest, like that Levite passing by him whom you ought to have taken and tended, and not receiving them into the inn for whom Christ paid the two pence, whose neighbour Christ bids you to become that you might show mercy to him. For he is our neighbour whom not only a similar condition has joined, but whom mercy has bound to us. You make yourself strange to him through pride, in vain puffing up yourself in your carnal mind, and not holding the Head. Colossians 2:18 For if you held the Head you would consider that you must not forsake him for whom Christ died. If you held the Head you would consider that the whole body, by joining together rather than by separating, grows unto the increase of God Colossians 2:19 by the bond of charity and the rescue of a sinner.

29. When, then, you take away all the fruits of repentance, what do you say but this: Let no one who is wounded enter our inn, let no one be healed in our Church? With us the sick are not cared for, we are whole, we have no need of a physician, for He Himself says: They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Chapter 7

St. Ambrose, addressing Christ, complains of the Novatians, and shows that they have no part with Christ, Who wishes all men to be saved.

30. So, then, Lord Jesus, come wholly to Your Church, since Novatian makes excuse. Novatian says, I have bought a yoke of oxen, and he puts not on the light yoke of Christ, but lays upon his shoulders a heavy burden which he is not able to bear. Novatian held back Your servants by whom he was invited, treated them contemptuously and slew them, polluting them with the stain of a reiterated baptism. Send forth, therefore, into the highways, and gather together good and bad, Luke 14:21 bring the weak, the blind, and the lame into Your Church. Command that Your house be filled, bring in all unto Your supper, for You will make him whom You shall call worthy, if he follow You. He indeed is rejected who has not the wedding garment, that is, the vestment of charity, the veil of grace. Send forth I pray You to all.

31. Your Church does not excuse herself from Your supper, Novatian makes excuse. Your family says not, I am whole, I need not the physician, but it says: Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved. Jeremiah 17:14 The likeness of Your Church is that woman who went behind and

touched the hem of Your garment, saying within herself: If I do but touch His garment I shall be whole. Matthew 9:21 So the Church confesses her wounds, but desires to be healed.

32. And You indeed, O Lord, desire that all should be healed, but all do not wish to be healed. Novatian wishes not, who thinks that he is whole. You, O Lord, say that You are sick, and feel our infirmity in the least of us, saying: I was sick and you visited Me. Matthew 25:36 Novatian does not visit that least one in whom You desire to be visited. You said to Peter when he excused himself from having his feet washed by You: If I wash not your feet, you will have no part with Me. John 13:8 What fellowship, then, can they have with You, who receive not the keys of the kingdom of heaven, saying that they ought not to remit sins?

33. And this confession is indeed rightly made by them, for they have not the succession of Peter, who hold not the chair of Peter, which they rend by wicked schism; and this, too, they do, wickedly denying that sins can be forgiven even in the Church, whereas it was said to Peter: I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven. Matthew 16:19 And the vessel of divine election himself said: If you have forgiven anything to any one, I forgive also, for what I have forgiven I have done it for your sakes in the person of Christ. 2 Corinthians 2:10 Why, then, do they read Paul's writings, if they think that he has erred so wickedly as to claim for himself the right of his Lord? But he claimed what he had received, he did not usurp that which was not due to him.

Chapter 8

It was the Lord's will to confer great gifts on His disciples. Further, the Novatians confute themselves by the practices of laying on of hands and of baptism, since it is by the same power that sins are remitted in penance and in baptism. Their conduct is then contrasted with that of our Lord.

34. It is the will of the Lord that His disciples should possess great powers; it is His will that the same things which He did when on earth should be done in His Name by His servants. For He said: You shall do greater things than these. He gave them power to raise the dead. And whereas He could Himself have restored to Saul the use of his sight, He nevertheless sent him to His disciple Ananias, that by his blessing Saul's eyes might be restored, the sight of which he had lost. Acts 9:17 Peter also He bade walk with Himself on the sea, and because he faltered He blamed him for lessening the grace given him by the weakness of his faith. Matthew 14:31 He Who Himself was the light of the world granted to His disciples to be the light of the world through grace. Matthew 5:14 And because He purposed to descend from heaven and to ascend there again, He took up Elijah into heaven to restore him again to earth at the time which should please Him. And being baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, He foreshadowed the Sacrament of Baptism at the hands of John. Matthew 3:11

35. And in fine He gave all gifts to His disciples, of whom He said: In My Name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall do well. Mark 16:17-18 So, then, He gave them all things, but there is no power of man exercised in these things, in which the grace of the divine gift operates.

36. Why, then, do you lay on hands, and believe it to be the effect of the blessing, if perchance some sick person recovers? Why do you assume that any can be cleansed by you from the pollution of the devil? Why do you baptize if sins cannot be remitted by man? If baptism is certainly the remission of all sins, what difference does it make whether priests claim that this power is given to them in penance or at the font? In each the mystery is one.

37. But you say that the grace of the mysteries works in the font. What works, then, in penance? Does not the Name of God do the work? What then? Do you, when you choose, claim for yourselves the grace of God, and when you choose reject it? But this is a mark of insolent presumption, not of holy fear, when those who wish to do penance are despised by you. You cannot, forsooth, endure the tears of the weepers; your eyes cannot bear the coarse clothing, the filth of the squalid; with proud eyes and puffed-up hearts you delicate ones say with angry tones, Touch me not, for I am pure.

38. The Lord said indeed to Mary Magdalene, Touch Me not, John 20:17 but He Who was pure did not say, because I am pure. Do you, Novatian, dare to call yourself pure, while, even if you were pure as regards your acts, you would be made impure by this saying alone? Isaiah says: O wretched that I am, and pricked to the heart; for that being a man, and having unclean lips, I dwell also in the midst of a people having unclean lips, Isaiah 6:5 and do you say, I am clean, when, as it is written, not even an infant of a day old is pure? David says, And cleanse me from my sin, whom for his tender heart the grace of God often cleansed; are you pure who are so unrighteous as to have no tenderness, as to see the mote in your brother's eye, but not to consider the beam which is in your own eye? For with God no one who is unjust is pure. And what is more unjust than to desire to have your sins forgiven you, and yet yourself to think that he who entreats you ought not to be forgiven? What is more unjust than to justify yourself in that wherein you condemn another, while you yourself are committing worse offenses?

39. Then, too, the Lord Jesus when about to consecrate the forgiveness of our sins replied to John, who said: I ought to be baptized by You, and You come to me? Suffer it now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Matthew 3:14-15 And the Lord indeed came to a sinner, though indeed He had no sin, and desired to be baptized, having no need of cleansing; who, then, can tolerate you, who think there is no need for you to be cleansed by penance, because you say you are cleansed by grace, as though it were now impossible for you to sin?

Chapter 9

By collating similar passages with 1 Samuel 3:25 , St. Ambrose shows that the meaning is not that no one shall intercede, but that the intercessor must be worthy as were Moses and Jeremiah, at whose prayers we read that God spared Israel.

40. But you say, It is written: If a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? First of all, as I already said before, I might allow you to make that objection if you refused penance to those only who denied the faith. But what difficulty does that question produce? For it is not written, No one shall entreat for him; but, Who shall entreat? that is to say, the question is, Who in such a case can entreat? The entreaty is not excluded.

41. Then you have in the fifteenth Psalm: Lord, who shall dwell in Your tabernacle, or who shall rest upon Your holy hill? It is not that no one, but that he who is approved shall dwell there, nor does it say that no one shall rest, but he who is chosen shall rest. And that you may know that this is true, it is said not much later in the twenty-fourth Psalm: Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place? The writer implies, not any ordinary person, or one of the common sort, but only a man of excellent life and of singular merit. And that we may understand that when the question is asked, Who? It does not imply no one, but some special one is meant, after having said Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? the Psalmist adds: He that has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lift up his mind unto vanity. And elsewhere it is said: Who is wise and he shall understand these things? Hosea 14:10 And in the Gospel: Who is the faithful and wise steward, whom the Lord shall set

over His household to give them their measure of wheat in due season? Luke 12:42 And that we may understand that He speaks of such as really exist, the Lord added: Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing. Luke 12:43 And I am of opinion that where it is said, Lord, who is like You? it is not meant that none is like, for the Son is the image of the Father.

42. We must then understand in the same manner, Who shall entreat for him? as implying: It must be some one of excellent life who shall entreat for him who has sinned against the Lord. The greater the sin, the more worthy must be the prayers that are sought. For it was not any one of the common people who prayed for the Jewish people, but Moses, Exodus 32:31 when forgetful of their covenant they worshipped the head of the calf. Was Moses wrong? Certainly he was not wrong in praying, who both merited and obtained that for which he asked. For what should such love not obtain as that of his when he offered himself for the people and said: And now, if You will forgive their sin, forgive; but if not, blot me out of the book of life. Exodus 32:32 We see that he does not think of himself, like a man full of fancies and scruples, whether he may incur the risk of some offense, as Novatian says he dreads that he might, but rather, thinking of all and forgetful of himself, he was not afraid lest he should offend, so that he might rescue and free the people from danger of offense.

43. Rightly, then, is it said: Who shall entreat for him? It implies that it must be such an one as Moses to offer himself for those who sin, or such as Jeremiah, who, though the Lord said to him, Pray not for this people, Jeremiah 7:16 and yet he prayed and obtained their forgiveness. For at the intercession of the prophet, and the entreaty of so great a seer, the Lord was moved and said to Jerusalem, which had meanwhile repented for its sins, and had said: O Almighty Lord God of Israel, the soul in anguish, and the troubled spirit cries unto You, hear, O Lord, and have mercy. And the Lord bids them lay aside the garments of mourning, and to cease the groanings of repentance, saying: Put off, O Jerusalem, the garment of your mourning and affliction. and clothe yourself in beauty, the glory which God has given you forever. Baruch 5:1

Chapter 10

St. John did not absolutely forbid that prayer should be made for those who sin unto death, since he knew that Moses, Jeremiah, and Stephen had so prayed, and he himself implies that forgiveness is not to be denied them.

44. Such intercessors, then, must be sought for after very grievous sins, for if any ordinary persons pray they are not heard.

45. So that point of yours will have no weight, which you take from the Epistle of John, where he says: He who knows that his brother sins a sin not unto death, let him ask, and God will give him life, because he sinned not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning it do I say, let him ask. 1 John 5:16 He was not speaking to Moses and Jeremiah, but to the people, who must seek another intercessor for their sins; the people, for whom it is sufficient they entreat God for their lighter faults, and consider that pardon for weightier sins must be reserved for the prayers of the just. For how could John say that graver sins should not be prayed for, when he had read that Moses prayed and obtained his request, where there had been wilful casting off of faith, and knew that Jeremiah also had entreated?

46. How could John say that we should not pray for the sin unto death, who himself in the Apocalypse wrote the message to the angel of the Church of Pergamos? You have there those that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to put a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. Repent likewise, or else I will come to you quickly. Revelation 2:14-16 Do you see that the

same God Who requires repentance promises forgiveness? And then He says: He that has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna. Revelation 2:17

47. Did not John himself know that Stephen prayed for his persecutors, who had not been able even to listen to the Name of Christ, when he said of those very men by whom he was being stoned: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge? Acts 7:60 And we see the result of this prayer in the case of the Apostle, for Paul, who kept the garments of those who were stoning Stephen, not long after became an apostle by the grace of God, having before been a persecutor.

Chapter 11

The passage quoted from St. John's Epistle is confirmed by another in which salvation is promised to those who believe in Christ, which refutes the Novatians who try to induce the lapsed to believe, although denying them pardon. Furthermore, many who had lapsed have received the grace of martyrdom, while the example of the good Samaritan shows that we must not abandon those in whom even the faintest amount of faith is still alive.

48. Since, then, we have spoken of the general Epistle of St. John, let us enquire whether the writings of John in the Gospel agree with your interpretation. For he writes that the Lord said: God so loved this world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that every one that believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16 If, then, you wish to reclaim any one of the lapsed, do you exhort him to believe, or not to believe? Undoubtedly you exhort him to believe. But, according to the Lord's words, he who believes shall have everlasting life. How, then, will you forbid to pray for him, who has a claim to everlasting life? Since faith is of divine grace, as the Apostle teaches where he speaks of the differences of gifts, for to another is given faith by the same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:9 And the disciples say to the Lord: Increase our faith. Luke 17:5 He then who has faith has life, and he who has life is certainly not shut out from pardon; that every one, it is said, that believes in Him should not perish. Since it is said, Every one, no one is shut out, no one is excepted, for He does not except him who has lapsed, if only afterwards he believes effectually.

49. We find that many have at length recovered themselves after a fall, and have suffered for the Name of God. Can we deny fellowship with the martyrs to these to whom the Lord Jesus has not denied it? Do we dare to say that life is not restored to those to whom Christ has given a crown? As, then, a crown is given to many after they have lapsed, so, too, if they believe, their faith is restored, which faith is the gift of God, as you read: Because unto you it has been granted by God not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in His behalf. Philippians 1:29 Is it possible that he who has the gift of God should not have His forgiveness?

50. Now it is not a single but a twofold grace that every one who believes should also suffer for the Lord Jesus. He, then, who believes receives his grace, but he receives a second, if his faith be crowned by suffering. For neither was Peter without grace before he suffered, but when he suffered he received a second gift. And many who have not had the grace to suffer for Christ have nevertheless had the grace of believing on Him.

51. Therefore it is said: That every one that believes in Him should not perish. Let no one, that is, of whatever condition, after whatever fall, fear that he will perish. For it may come to pass that the good Samaritan of the Gospel may find some one going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, that is, falling back from the martyr's conflict to the pleasures of this life and the comforts of the world; wounded by

robbers, that is, by persecutors, and left half dead; that good Samaritan, Who is the Guardian of our souls (for the word Samaritan means Guardian), may, I say, not pass by him but tend and heal him.

52. Perchance He therefore passes him not by, because He sees in him some signs of life, so that there is hope that he may recover. Does it not seem to you that he who has fallen is half alive if faith sustains any breath of life? For he is dead who wholly casts God out of his heart. He, then, who does not wholly cast Him out, but under pressure of torments has denied Him for a time, is half dead. Or if he be dead, why do you bid him repent, seeing he cannot now be healed? If he be half dead, pour in oil and wine, not wine without oil, that may be the comfort and the smart. Place him upon your beast, give him over to the host, lay out two pence for his cure, be to him a neighbour. But you cannot be a neighbour unless you have compassion on him; for no one can be called a neighbour unless he have healed, not killed, another. But if you wish to be called a neighbour, Christ says to you: Go and do likewise. Luke 10:37

Chapter 12
Another passage of St. John is considered. The necessity of keeping the commandments of God may be complied with by those who, having fallen, repent, as well as by those who have not fallen, as is shown in the case of David.

53. Let us consider another similar passage: He that believes in the Son has eternal life, but he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. John 3:36 That which abides has certainly had a commencement, and that from some offense, viz., that first he not believe. When, then, any one believes, the wrath of God departs and life comes. To believe, then, in Christ is to gain life, for he that believes in Him is not judged. John 3:18

54. But with reference to this passage they allege that he who believes in Christ ought to keep His sayings, and say that it is written in the Lord's own words: I have come a light into this world, that whosoever believes in Me may not abide in darkness. And if any man hear My word and keep it, I judge him not. He judges not, and do you judge? He says, that whosoever believes in Me may not abide in darkness, that is, that if he be in darkness he may not remain therein, but may amend his error, correct his fault, and keep My commandments, for I have said, I will not the death of the wicked, but the correction. Ezekiel 23:11 I said above that he that believes in Me is not judged, and I keep to this: For I am not come to judge the world, but that the world may be saved through Me. John 3:17 I pardon willingly, I quickly forgive, I will have mercy rather than sacrifice, Hosea 6:6 because by sacrifice the just is rendered more acceptable, by mercy the sinner is redeemed. I come not to call the righteous but sinners. Matthew 9:13 Sacrifice was under the Law, in the Gospel is mercy. The Law was given by Moses, grace by Me. John 1:17

55. And again further on He says: He that despises Me, and receives not My words, has one that judges him. John 12:48 Does he seem to you to have received Christ's words who has not corrected himself? Undoubtedly not. He, then, who corrects himself receives His word, for this is His word, that every one should turn back from sin. So, then, of necessity you must either reject this saying of His, or if you cannot deny it you must accept it.

56. It is also necessary that he who leaves off sinning must keep the commandments of God and renounce his sins. We ought not, then, to interpret this saying of him who has always kept the commandments, for if this had been His meaning He would have added the word always, but by not adding it He shows that He was speaking of him who has kept what he has heard, and what he heard has led him to correct his faults; he has then kept what he has heard.

57. But how hard it is to condemn to penance for life one who even afterwards keeps the commandments of the Lord, let Him teach us Himself Who has not refused forgiveness. Even to those who do not keep His commandments, as you read in the Psalm: If they profane My statutes and keep not My commandments, I will visit their offenses with the rod and their sins with scourges, but My mercy will I not take from them. So, then, He promises mercy to all.

58. Yet that we may not think that this mercy is without judgment, there is a distinction made between those who have paid continual obedience to God's commandments, and those who at some time, either by error or by compulsion, have fallen. And that you may not think that it is only our arguments which press you, consider the decision of Christ, Who said: If the servant knew his Lord's will and did it not, he shall be beaten with many stripes, but if he knew it not, he shall be beaten with few stripes. Luke 12:47-48 Each, then, if he believes, is received, for God chastens every son whom He receives, Hebrews 12:6 and him whom He chastens He does not give over unto death, for it is written: The Lord has chastened me sore, but He has not given me over unto death.

Chapter 13

They who have committed a sin unto death are not to be abandoned, but subjected to penance, according to St. Paul. Explanation of the phrase Deliver unto Satan. Satan can afflict the body, but these afflictions bring spiritual profit, showing the power of God, Who thus turns Satan's devices against himself.

59. Lastly, Paul teaches us that we must not abandon those who have committed a sin unto death, but that we must rather coerce them with the bread of tears and tears to drink, yet so that their sorrow itself be moderated. For this is the meaning of the passage: You have given them to drink in large measure, that their sorrow itself should have its measure, lest perchance he who is doing penance should be consumed by overmuch sorrow, as was said to the Corinthians: What will you? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness? 1 Corinthians 4:21 But even the rod is not severe, since he had read: You shall beat him indeed with the rod, but shall deliver his soul from death. Proverbs 23:13

60. What the Apostle means by the rod is shown by his invective against fornication, his denunciation of incest, his reprehension of pride, because they were puffed up who ought rather to be mourning, and lastly, his sentence on the guilty person, that he should be excluded from communion, and delivered to the adversary, not for the destruction of the soul but of the flesh. For as the Lord did not give power to Satan over the soul of holy Job, but allowed him to afflict his body, Job 2:6 so here, too, the sinner is delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the serpent might lick the dust Micah 7:17 of his flesh, but not hurt his soul.

61. Let, then, our flesh die to lusts, let it be captive, let it be subdued, and not war against the law of our mind, but die in subjection to a good service, as in Paul, who buffeted his body that he might bring it into subjection, in order that his preaching might become more approved, if the law of his flesh agreed and was consonant with the law of his flesh. For the flesh dies when its wisdom passes over into the spirit, so that it no longer has a taste for the things of the flesh, but for the things of the spirit. Would that I might see my flesh growing weak, would that I were not dragged captive into the law of sin, would that I lived not in the flesh, but in the faith of Christ! And so there is greater grace in the infirmity of the body than in its soundness.

62. Having explained Paul's meaning, let us now consider the words themselves, in what sense he said that he had delivered him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, for the devil it is who tries us. For he

brings ailments on each of our limbs, and sickness on our whole bodies. And then, too, he smote holy Job with evil sores from the feet to the head, because he had received the power of destroying his flesh, when God said: Behold, I give him up unto you, only preserve his life. Job 2:6 This the Apostle took up in the same words, giving up this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:5

63. Great is the power, great is the gift, which commands the devil to destroy himself. For he destroys himself when he makes the man whom he is seeking to overthrow by temptation stronger instead of weak, because while he is weakening the body he is strengthening his soul. For sickness of the body restrains sin, but luxury sets on fire the sin of the flesh.

64. The devil is then deceived so as to wound himself with his own bite, and to arm against himself him whom he thought to weaken. So he armed holy Job the more after he wounded him, who, with his whole body covered with sores, endured indeed the bite of the devil, but felt not his poison. And so it is well said of him, You shall draw out the dragon with an hook, you will play with him as with a bird, you shall bind him as a boy does a sparrow, you shall lay your hand upon him.

65. You see how he is mocked by Paul, so that, like the child in prophecy, he lays his hand on the hole of the asp, and the serpent injures him not; he draws him out of his hiding-places, and makes of his venom a spiritual antidote, so that what is venom becomes a medicine, the venom serves to the destruction of the flesh, it becomes medicine to the healing of the spirit. For that which hurts the body benefits the spirit.

66. Let, then, the serpent bite the earthy part of me, let him drive his tooth into my flesh, and bruise my body; and may the Lord say of me: I give him up unto you, only preserve his life. How great is the power of Christ, that the guardianship of man is made a charge even to the devil himself, who always desires to injure him. Let us then make the Lord Jesus favourable to ourselves. At the command of Christ the devil himself becomes the guardian of his prey. Even unwillingly he carries out the commands of heaven, and, though cruel, obeys the commands of gentleness.

67. But why do I commend his obedience? Let him be ever evil that God may be ever good, Who converts his ill-will into grace for us. He wishes to injure us, but cannot if Christ resist him. He wounds the flesh but preserves the life. And then it is written: Then shall the wolves and the lambs feed together, the lion and the ox shall eat straw, and they shall not hurt nor destroy in My holy mountain, says the Lord. For this is the sentence of condemnation on the serpent: Dust shall be your food. Genesis 3:14 What dust? Surely that of which it is said: Dust you are, and into dust shall you return. Genesis 3:19

Chapter 14

St. Ambrose explains that the flesh given to Satan for destruction is eaten by the serpent when the soul is set free from carnal desires. He gives, therefore, various rules for guarding the senses, points out the snares laid for us by means of pleasures, and exhorts his hearers not to fear the destruction of the flesh by the serpent.

68. The serpent eats this dust, if the Lord Jesus is favourable to us, that our spirit may not sympathize with the weakness of the flesh, nor be set on fire by the vapours of the flesh and the heat of our members. It is better to marry than to burn, for there is a flame which burns within. Let us not then suffer this fire to approach the bosom of our minds and the depths of our hearts, lest we burn up the covering of our inmost hearts, and lest the devouring fire of lust consume this outward garment of the

soul and its fleshy veil, but let us pass through the fire. Isaiah 43:2 And should any one fall into the fire of love let him leap over it and pass forth; let him not bind to himself adulterous lust with the bands of thoughts, let him not tie knots around himself by the fastenings of continual reflection, let him not too often turn his attention to the form of a harlot, and let not a maiden lift her eyes to the countenance of a youth. And if by chance she has looked and is caught, how much more will she be entangled if she gazes with curiosity.

69. Let custom itself teach us. A woman covers her face with a veil for this reason, that in public her modesty may be safe. That her face may not easily meet the gaze of a youth, let her be covered with the nuptial veil, so that not even in chance meetings she might be exposed to the wounding of another or of herself, though the wound of either were indeed hers. But if she cover her head with a veil that she may not accidentally see or be seen (for when the head is veiled the face is hidden), how much more ought she to cover herself with the veil of modesty, so as even in public to have her own secret place.

70. But granted that the eye has fallen upon another, at least let not the inward affection follow. For to have seen is no sin, but one must be careful that it be not the source of sin. The bodily eye sees, but let the eye of the heart be closed; let modesty of mind remain. We have a Lord Who is both strict and indulgent. The prophet indeed said: Look not upon the beauty of a woman that is all harlot. But the Lord said: Whoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart. Matthew 5:28 He does not say, Whosoever shall look has committed adultery, but Whosoever shall look on her to lust after her. He condemned not the look but sought out the inward affection. But that modesty is praiseworthy which has so accustomed itself to close the bodily eyes as often not to see what we really behold. For we seem to behold with the bodily sight whatever meets us; but if there be not joined to this any attention of the mind, the sight also, according to what is usual in the body, fades away, so that in reality we see rather with the mind than with the body.

71. And if the flesh has seen the flame, let us not cherish that flame in our bosoms, that is, in the depths of the heart and the inward part of the mind. Let us not instil this fire into our bones, let us not bind bonds upon ourselves, let us not join in conversation with such as may be the cause to us of unholy fires. The speech of a maiden is a snare to a youth, the words of a youth are the bonds of love.

72. Joseph saw the fire when the woman eager for adultery spoke to him. Genesis 39:7 She wished to catch him with her words. She set the snares of her lips, but was not able to capture the chaste man. For the voice of modesty, the voice of gravity, the rein of caution, the care for integrity, the discipline of chastity, loosed the woman's chains. So that unchaste person could not entangle him in her meshes. She laid her hand upon him; she caught his garment, that she might tighten the noose around him. The words of a lascivious woman are the snares of lust, and her hands the bonds of love; but the chaste mind could not be taken either by snares or by bonds. The garment was cast off, the bonds were loosed, and because he did not admit the fire into the bosom of his mind, his body was not burnt.

73. You see, then, that our mind is the cause of our guilt. And so the flesh is innocent, but is often the minister of sin. Let not, then, desire of beauty overcome you. Many nets and many snares are spread by the devil. The look of a harlot is the snare of him who loves her. Our own eyes are nets to us, wherefore it is written: Be not taken with your eyes. Proverbs 6:25 So, then, we spread nets for ourselves in which we are entangled and hampered. We bind chains on ourselves, as we read: For every one is bound with the chains of his own sins.

74. Let us then pass through the fires of youth and the glow of early years; let us pass through the waters, let us not remain therein, lest the deep floods shut us in. Let us rather pass over, that we too

may say: Our soul has passed over the stream, for he who has passed over is safe. And lastly, the Lord speaks thus: If you pass through the water, I am with you, the rivers shall not overflow you. Isaiah 43:2 And the prophet says: I have seen the wicked exalted above the cedars of Libanus, and I passed by, and lo, he was not. Pass by things of this world, and you will see that the high places of the wicked have fallen. Moses, too, passing by things of this world, saw a great sight and said: I will turn aside and see this great sight, Exodus 3:3 for had he been held by the fleeting pleasures of this world he would not have seen so great a mystery.

75. Let us also pass over this fire of lust, fearing which Paul— but fearing for us, inasmuch as by buffeting his body he had come no longer to fear for himself — says to us: Flee fornication. 1 Corinthians 6:18 Let us then flee it as though following us, though indeed it follows not behind us, but within our very selves. Let us then diligently take heed lest while we are fleeing from it we carry it with ourselves. For we wish for the most part to flee, but if we do not wholly cast it out of our mind, we rather take it up than forsake it. Let us then spring over it, lest it be said to us: Walk in the flame of your fire, which you have kindled for yourselves. Isaiah 50:11 For as he who takes fire into his bosom burns his clothes, Proverbs 6:27 so he who walks upon fiery coals must of necessity burn his feet, as it is written: Can one walk upon coals of fire and not burn his feet? Proverbs 6:28

76. This fire is dangerous, let us then not feed it with the fuel of luxury. Lust is fed by feastings, nourished by delicacies, kindled by wine, and inflamed by drunkenness. Still more dangerous than these are the incentives of words, which intoxicate the mind as it were with a kind of wine of the vine of Sodom. Let us be on our guard against abundance of this wine, for when the flesh is intoxicated the mind totters, the heart wavers, the heart is carried to and fro. And so with regard to each that precept is useful wherein Timothy is warned: Drink a little wine because of your frequent infirmities. 1 Timothy 5:23 When the body is heated, it excites the glow of the mind; when the flesh is chilled with the cold of disease the spirit is chilled; when the body is in pain, the mind is sad, but the sadness shall become joy.

77. Do not then fear if your flesh be eaten away, the soul is not consumed. And so David says that he does not fear, because the enemy were eating up his flesh but not his soul, as we read: When evil-doers come near upon me to eat up my flesh, my foes who trouble me, they were weakened and fell. So the serpent works overthrow for himself alone, therefore is he who has been injured by the serpent given over to the serpent that he may raise up again him whom he cast down, and the overthrow of the serpent may be the raising again of the man. And Scripture testifies that Satan is the author of this bodily suffering and weakness of the flesh, where Paul says: There was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted. 2 Corinthians 12:7 So Paul learned to heal even as he himself had been made whole.

Chapter 15

Returning from this digression, St. Ambrose explains what is the meaning of St. Paul where he speaks of coming with a rod or in the spirit of meekness. One who has grievously fallen is to be separated, but to be again restored to religious privileges when he has sufficiently repented. The old leaven is purged out when the hardness of the letter is tempered by the meal of a milder interpretation. All should be sprinkled with the Church's meal and fed with the food of charity, lest they become like that envious elder brother, whose example is followed by the Novatians.

78. That faithful teacher, having promised one of two things, gave each. He came with a rod, for he separated the guilty man from the holy fellowship. And well is he said to be delivered to Satan who is separated from the body of Christ. But he came in love and with the spirit of meekness, whether

because he so delivered him up as to save his soul, or because he afterwards restored to the sacraments him whom he had before separated.

79. For it is needful to separate one who has grievously fallen, lest a little leaven corrupt the whole lump. And the old leaven must be purged out, or the old man in each person; that is, the outward man and his deeds, he who among the people has grown old in sin and hardened in vices. And well did he say purged, not cast forth, for what is purged is not considered wholly valueless, for to this end is it purged, that what is of value be separated from the worthless, but that which is cast forth is considered to have in itself nothing of value.

80. The Apostle then judged that the sinner should then at once be restored to the heavenly sacraments if he himself wished to be cleansed. And well is it said Purge, for he is purged as by certain things done by the whole people, and is washed in the tears of the multitude, and redeemed from sin by the weeping of the multitude, and is purged in the inner man. For Christ granted to His Church that one should be redeemed by means of all, as she herself was found worthy of the coming of the Lord Jesus, in order that through One all might be redeemed.

81. This is Paul's meaning which the words make more obscure. Let us consider the exact words of the Apostle: Purge out, says he, the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. 1 Corinthians 5:7 Either that the whole Church takes up the burden of the sinner, with whom she has to suffer in weeping and prayer and pain, and, as it were, covers herself with his leaven, in order that by means of all that which is to be done away in the individual doing penance may be purged by a kind of contribution and commixture of compassion and mercy offered with manly vigor. Or one may understand it as that woman in the Gospel teaches us, who is a type of the Church, when she hid the leaven in her meal, till all was leavened, and the whole could be used as pure.

82. The Lord taught me in the Gospel what leaven is when He said: Do you not understand that I said not concerning bread, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Matthew 16:11 Then, it is said, they understood that He spoke not of bread, but that they should beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. This leaven, then — that is, the doctrine of the Pharisees and the contentiousness of the Sadducees— the Church hides in her meal, when she softened the hard letter of the Law by a spiritual interpretation, and ground it as it were in the mill of her explanations, bringing out as it were from the husks of the letter the inner secrets of the mysteries, and setting forth the belief in the Resurrection, wherein the mercy of God is proclaimed, and wherein it is believed that the life of those who are dead is restored.

83. Now this comparison seems to be not unfitly brought forward in this place, since the kingdom of heaven is redemption from sin, and therefore we all, both bad and good, are mingled with the meal of the Church that we all may be a new lump. But that no one may be afraid that an admixture of evil leaven might injure the lump, the Apostle said: That you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; 1 Corinthians 5:7 that is to say, This mixture will render you again such, as in the pure integrity of your innocence. If we thus have compassion, we are not stained with the sins of others, but we gain the restoration of another to the increase of our own grace, so that our integrity remains as it was. And therefore he adds: For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; 1 Corinthians 5:7 that is, the Passion of the Lord profited all, and gave redemption to sinners who repented of the sins they had committed.

84. Let us then keep the feast on good food, doing penance yet joyful in our redemption, for no food is sweeter than kindness and gentleness. Let no envy towards the sinner who is saved be mingled with our

feasts and joy, lest that envious brother, as is set forth in the Gospel, exclude himself from the house of his Father, because he grieved at the reception of his brother, at whose lasting exile he was wont to rejoice.

85. And you Novatians cannot deny that you are like him, who, as you say, do not come together to the Church because by penance a hope of return had been given to those who had lapsed. But this is only a pretence, for Novatian contrived his schism through grief at his loss of the episcopal office.

86. But do you not understand that the Apostle also prophesied of you and says to you: And you are puffed up and did not rather mourn, that he who did this deed might be taken away from among you? 1 Corinthians 5:2 He is, then, wholly taken away when his sin is done away, but the Apostle does not say that the sinner is to be shut out of the Church who counsels his cleansing.

Chapter 16
Comparison between the apostles and Novatians. The fitness of the words, You know not what spirit you are of, when applied to them. The desire of penance is extinguished by them when they take away its fruit. And thus are sinners deprived of the promises of Christ, though, indeed, they ought not to be too soon admitted to the mysteries. Some examples of repentance.

87. Inasmuch, then, as the Apostle forgave sins, by what authority do you say that they are not to be forgiven? Who has the most reverence for Christ, Paul or Novatian? But Paul knew that the Lord was merciful. He knew that the Lord Jesus was offended more by the harshness of the disciples than by their pitifulness.

88. Furthermore, Jesus rebuked James and John when they spoke of bringing down fire from heaven to consume those who refused to receive the Lord, and said to them: You know not whose spirit you are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. Luke 9:55-56 To them, indeed, He said, You know not whose spirit you are of, who were of His spirit; but to you He says, You are not of My spirit, who hold not fast My clemency, who reject My mercy, who refuse repentance which I willed to be preached by the apostles in My Name.

89. For it is in vain that you say that you preach repentance who remove the fruits of repentance. For men are led to the pursuit of anything either by rewards or results, and every pursuit grows slack by delay. And for this reason the Lord, in order that the devotion of His disciples might be increased, said that every one who had left all that was his, and followed God, should receive sevenfold more both here and hereafter. Matthew 19:29 First of all He promised the reward here, to do away with the tedium of delay, and again hereafter, that we might learn to believe that rewards will also be given to us hereafter. Present rewards are then an earnest of those hereafter.

90. If, then, any one, having committed hidden sins, shall nevertheless diligently do penance, how shall he receive those rewards if not restored to the communion of the Church? I am willing, indeed, that the guilty man should hope for pardon, should seek it with tears and groans, should seek it with the aid of the tears of all the people, should implore forgiveness; and if communion be postponed two or three times, that he should believe that his entreaties have not been urgent enough, that he must increase his tears, must come again even in greater trouble, clasp the feet of the faithful with his arms, kiss them, wash them with tears, and not let them go, so that the Lord Jesus may say of him too: His sins which are many are forgiven, for he loved much. Luke 7:47

91. I have known penitents whose countenance was furrowed with tears, their cheeks worn with constant weeping, who offered their body to be trodden under foot by all, who with faces ever pale and worn with fasting bore about in a yet living body the likeness of death.

Chapter 17
That gentleness must be added to severity, as is shown in the case of St. Paul at Corinth. The man had been baptized, though the Novatians argue against it. And by the word destruction is not meant annihilation but severe chastening.

92. Why do we postpone the time of pardon for those who have mortified themselves, who during life have done themselves to death? Sufficient, says St. Paul, to such a one is this punishment which is inflicted by the many; so that contrariwise, you should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means he should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 2 Corinthians 2:6 If the punishment which is inflicted by the many is sufficient for condemnation, the intercession which is made by many is also sufficient for the remission of sin. The Master of morals, Who both knows our weakness and is the interpreter of the will of God, wills that comfort should be given, lest sorrow through the weariness of long delay should swallow up the penitent.

93. The Apostle then forgave him, and not only forgave him, but desired that love to him should again grow strong. He who is loved receives not harshness but mercy. And not only did he himself forgive him only, but willed that all should forgive him, and says that he forgave for the sake of others, lest many should be longer saddened on account of one. To whom, says he, you have forgiven anything, I forgive also, for I also have forgiven for your sakes in the person of Christ, for we are not ignorant of his devices. 2 Corinthians 2:10 Rightly can he be on his guard against the serpent who is not ignorant of his devices, of which there are so many to our detriment. He is always desirous to do harm, always desirous to circumvent us, that he may cause death; but we ought to take heed lest our remedy become an occasion of triumph for him; for we are circumvented by him, if any one perish through overmuch sorrow, who might be set free by pitifulness.

94. And that we may know that this person was baptized, he added: I wrote to you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators, not altogether with fornicators of this world. 1 Corinthians 5:9 And farther on he adds: But now I write unto you not to keep company if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator. 1 Corinthians 5:11 Those whom he has joined together under one penalty, he willed to attain together to forgiveness. If any be such, he says, with him not to eat. 1 Corinthians 5:11 How severe he is with the obstinate, how indulgent to those who seek. Against those rises up in arms the injury done to Christ, while the calling upon Christ aids these.

95. But lest any one be perplexed because it is written: I have delivered such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, 1 Corinthians 5:5 and should say: How can he attain forgiveness whose whole flesh has perished, seeing that it is evident that man was redeemed both in body and soul, and is saved in both and that neither the soul without the body, nor yet the body without the soul, since both are united by their fellowship in the deeds that have been done, can be without fellowship either in punishment or in reward? Let this suffice for an answer to him: That destruction does not mean the complete annihilation of the flesh, but its chastening. For as he who is dead to sin lives to God, so the allurements of the flesh perish, and the flesh dies to its lusts, in order that it may live again to purity and to other good works.

96. And what more suitable example can we take than one from our common mother? For the earth itself, from which we are all taken, when it is not worked and cultivated, seems to be desert; and the

field dies to the vines or olive-trees with which it was planted, and yet it does not lose its own nutritive power, which is, as it were, its life. And then later, when cultivation begins once more, and the seed is sown for which the land seems suitable, it breaks forth again more fruitful than before with its products. It is not, then, anything so strange if our flesh is said to die, and yet is understood to be subdued rather than annihilated.